

Google makes 'Bolo app' to help children of backward areas read and speak Hindi and English

BHOPAL: Improving the ranking of aspirational district of Damoh in the Niti Aayog ranking, Google developed an app called 'Bolo app' to help students read and speak proper Hindi and English. Piramal Foundation, an NGO working in collaboration with the Niti Aayog, has partnered with Google to scale-up the app usage through its various programs. The partnership with the NGO will ensure increase in outreach and installation of the app with large number of students' and parents. The founders are encouraging the people with android phones to download the app and teach the children of the villages by acting as catalysts of change.

The app is an interactive app that corrects the reader when s/he pronounces a word wrong. The app aims to convert non-readers into readers and more children can benefit from it. The app that was launched last month has already benefited around 15,000 users who are learning Hindi and English with the help of the app.

"To increase the reach of the app, we have trained 400 youth at cluster level that includes students of class 10 and above, teachers, members of gram sabha and Gandhi fellows who are acting as catalysts of change and taking this app to parents of children. As not everyone has a mobile phone in villages, these youths help children to use the app on their phones," said Vivek Tiwari, member of the NGO.

The app helps children hear, speak and read the stories fed into it allowing them to learn the pronunciation and correct spelling of the words. The offline version of the 'Bolo app' can also be used to download more stories from the net.

"We had already tried a number of traditional approaches to increase literacy but they bore no results. So after a lot of thinking, we decided to use the latest technology to create a platform where students listen to the texts before them and repeat after it. The app also allows the user to read and points out the mistakes in reading. This is exactly how a child begins to learn a language. He hears, repeats and then makes sense of it."

Many teachers have already started using the app in schools to make children read and identify different letters. The app also records the progress of each individual who uses it.

Tiwari said, "After Damoh was put in the category of aspirational districts, we decided to do something to improve literacy in the district. We realized that even students of class 5 were unable to read the text of class 2 while those of class 8 couldn't read even class 6 level books. With so much competition, if we do not take steps towards introduction of technology in education, these children will lag behind."

The app will also allow children to play language-based games that help in improving their grammar and vocabulary.

"We used mobile app so that children can also learn to use the latest technology like the ones in the city. If they are introduced to new technology at an early stage, they will be able to use it to their advantage," Tiwari added.